Antonio Maria GENTILI

THE BARNABITES

Manual of history and spirituality
of the Order of Clerics Regular
of St. Paul Beheaded

Chapter 14

THE MADONNA OF THE BARNABITES

The cult of Mary is a peculiar and irreplaceable aspect of the life of the Church, and, therefore, it is most natural for Religious Congregations to reserve, from their very first beginnings, a special place to the Blessed Virgin Mary in their life and institutions. Marracci, who in the 1600's made a collection of Marian material, lists St. Anthony M. Zaccaria, Venerable James Anthony Morigia, and Venerable Bartholomew Ferrari among the "Marian Founders."

We do not have many documents of Anthony Mary's devotion to Mary, but the little we have is very precious. For his catechism lessons he used to gather the youth in front of the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St. Vincent in Cremona; he used to start his writings with the names of Jesus and Mary; he recommended the meditation on Mary's Sorrows; etc. Then, we have two statements in his Sermons, rather short, but pregnant with filial love toward Mary. In one he affirms that the two greatest marvels of God were the death of the Lord for our salvation, and the motherhood of a Virgin. In another case, talking of Mary as opposed to Eve, he cannot contain his feelings and adds few devout expressions: "The intact Virgin Mother, our Madonna, the Virgin Mary." Finally we have to note that the Holy Founder used to select Marian feast days for the investiture of his new followers.

Marracci affirms that Fr. Morigia "expected eternal salvation from Mary." The tradition in the Congregation to add the name of Mary to the baptismal one goes back to Fr. Morigia, and it became a constant custom in the last century after the canonization of our Founder, whose name was Anthony Mary.

In 1545, Fr. Morigia, in giving the Barnabite habit to John Malipiero, confirmed his name John, and then added the one of Mary: "in memory of that holy union left to us as a testament by the Crucified Christ, when, hanging on the hard wood, said to his Mother, talking to his cousin John: 'Behold your son,' and to the same John, 'Behold your Mother'; from that hour he accepted her as his (Mother): so that he may make the effort to imitate the chaste Apostle and enlightened Evangelist, and the Queen of Heavens, Mother of God and our Mediatrix, with her invocation and protection." And this is how he will be called from then on, as the secretary noted, adding that: "This is a happy and joyous thing."

As for Fr. Ferrari, Marracci tells us that for love of Mary he used to mortify himself so much that his brother Basilio had to reprimand him. He was also the permanent confessor of the Angelic Sisters, and he used to exhort them to always honor more the Blessed Mother. He was instrumental in establishing the fast on Wednesdays in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and on Saturdays the recitation of the Litanies of Loreto, which then became a daily custom during the night prayers.

We can see from the above that the Barnabite Marian devotion is rooted in our three Co-founders.

It has been observed, and rightly so, that the Barnabite Marian devotion has taken different tones in various centuries. In the 1500's it was the Sorrowful Mother, upon whose sorrows the Holy Founder exhorted his followers to meditate. In the 1600's it was Our Lady of Loreto. In many of our houses the replica of the Little House of Loreto was reproduced,

and many Barnabites went to Loreto on pilgrimage, including St. Francis Xavier Bianchi. Fr. Palma too, instrumental for the devotion to Our Lady Mother of Divine Providence, as we shall see, in the 1700's went on pilgrimage to Loreto. The 1800's is the century of the Immaculate.

It has to be noted that from the very first beginnings a special devotion to Our Lady patroness of studies was developed. The Chapter of 1602 decreed the celebration of the Mass for the Priests, the Rosary for the Clerics, and fifteen Our Fathers and Hail Marys for the Brothers on the feasts of the Purification, Annunciation, Nativity, and Immaculate Conception for progress in our studies. The decree is still in force today for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. As part of this tradition it is important to recall that St. Alexander Sauli introduced the custom of reciting the "Ave Maris Stella" for the good outcome of our studies.

OUR LADY MOTHER OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The Barnabites had affirmed their presence in many Italian cities but not in Rome. On two occasions, for many reasons, they refused the church of Our Lady in Aquiro and the church of St. Agatha alla Suburra. However, finally on March 30, 1575, they accepted and formally took over the little church of St. Blaise all'Anello. The Fathers demolished the crumbling little church and embarked themselves in the building of a new majestic church, second only to St. Peter's Basilica for its dome, dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo. The construction took many years in the midst of many difficulties, as a matter of fact it even remained idle for six years for lack of funds. In 1626, the parish priest, Fr. Blaise Palma, decided to make a pilgrimage to Loreto to beg the aid of Our Lady. He was convinced that the Mother of the Lord would not be indifferent to his appeal. Upon his return from his pilgrimage he went to visit Cardinal Leni to ask for his help. A year went by without an answer, but on October 11 the Cardinal became extremely ill. Before dying he called Fr. Palma and left most of his inheritance to finish the construction of the church, which was completed in 1650, but will be consecrated only on March 19, 1722, by Cardinal Laurent Corsini, future Pope Clement XII.

Fr. Palma wishing to safeguard this miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary wrote a lengthy and factual account and placed it in the parish archives. He recommended everyone to appeal to the Virgin of Providence with the greatest confidence whenever difficulties presented themselves.

A second event also influenced the origins of the cult to Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence. In 1659, forced to abandon their second house in Rome, the Barnabites wished to remove part of a wall from the church of St. Paul alla Colonna, on which there was painted a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary. Unfortunately in 1664 when they tried to place it over an altar, it fell and broke into a thousand pieces. To repay the Barnabites, the architect responsible for the relocation of the fresco offered them a canvas with a magnificent image of the Blessed Mother holding the Infant Jesus in her arms. It was a painting by the celebrated Scipione Pulzone da Gaeta (1550-1597), a disciple of Raphael. This painting was placed on the altar of the private chapel of the Barnabite community, on the first floor of the convent. The Barnabites used to get together there daily for the recitation of the Divine Office and their spiritual exercises.

It was by accident that the pastor, Fr. January Maffetti, happened to discover the writings of Fr. Palma in the community archives. He read them immediately and was struck by confident love, lively faith, and kindly gratitude toward the Mother of God. He felt springing up within him an ardent desire to spread devotion to Our Lady. He asked Brother Peter Valentini to make an exact copy of the painting, and on July 23, 1732 he placed it in a corridor leading from the convent to the church presbitery, no other place being available at that time. Above the painting one could read the title "Mother of Divine Providence." The cult of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, was officially born.

Why he selected this title we do not know. Perhaps the children of St. Anthony M. Zaccaria, Barnabites and Angelics, from the very beginning had a predilection for such a title. As early as 1630, a statue of the Blessed Mother on the bell-tower of the Barnabite church in Bologna, had the title "Lady of Divine Providence," while the Angelics since the beginning of the 1600's had been venerating an image of the Blessed Mother with Child under the same title.

The exposition of the painting to public veneration in the church of St. Charles ai Catinari resulted in a tremendous excitement among the people of Rome. Graces and favors of all kinds were obtained and continue to the present. These clearly demonstrated how much it pleased Our Lady to be invoked under this title which corresponds so well to the most intimate desires of her maternal heart. The little corridor, transformed into a chapel on June 28, 1742, by Fr. General Mario Maccabei, rapidly became a rich sanctuary where votive candles, both large and small, left by the faithful, were always burning.

On September 25, 1744, Pope Benedict XIV established a Confraternity under the title of Mother of Divine Providence and enriched it with many indulgences.

On March 10, 1834, the Barnabites were granted by Gregory XVI the permission to add the title "Help of Christians," a title used during the fight against the attacks of the Moslems in Vienna. The same Gregory XVI elevated the Confraternity to the rank of Archconfraternity on July 16, 1839, and granted to the Superior General of the Barnabites, the right, in perpetuity, to enroll in the Archconfraternity of Rome all associations and all confraternities which would be established under this title throughout the world.

The Shrine of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, always enjoyed the particular favor of the Supreme Pontiffs. Benedict XIV, for example, visited each year and was delighted in presenting rich gifts to Our Lady as a true sign of his generosity and his sincere devotion.

On February 2, 1815, Pope Pius VII, acknowledging that he owned his return to the Eternal City to the protection of Mary, visited the Shrine of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, and declared the altar perpetually privileged.

Pius IX, who spent the first years of his priestly life near the Shrine of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, never allowed an opportunity to pass to show his devotion to Our Lady. More than once, he celebrated Mass at her altar. He offered the precious chasuble he wore of the day of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854.

In 1888, Pope Leo XIII ordered the solemn crowning of the "Miraculous Lady" and approved the Mass and Office of Our Lady Mother of Divine Providence.

Saint Pius X showed his devotion to the Madonna of St. Charles ai Catinari by granting permission for the Votive Mass of Our Lady Mother of Providence for all the Saturdays of the year, and he also approved her scapular.

A robbery on the night of February 15, 1859, stripped the painting of all riches. The Barnabites, thanks to generous donations, were able to refurbish the little sanctuary with

marble and precious metals. The animators of this restoration were two Barnabites: Cardinal Louis Lambruschini, Secretary of State of Gregory XVI, and Cardinal Anthony Cadolini, Archbishop of Ancona.

When the renovation was completed, Cardinal Lambruschini consecrated the chapel on November 7, 1841. He is buried at the foot of the altar.

In 1832, Fr. Thomas Manini, rector of St. Charles, founded a new Congregation of Sisters under the title "Sisters of Our Lady of Providence."

In a circular letter, August 5, 1896, Fr. Benedict Nisser, Superior General (1895-1901), wrote that the Blessed Virgin always responds to the piety of her own, appearing to them under the tender name of Mother of Divine Providence, Help of Christians, from this painting which suggests grace, sweetness, and a heavenly gentleness. It seems, to those who contemplate this image of Mary, that Mother and Son, in an expression of love, engage in a dialogue which is not of this world.

By decree of Fr. General Baravelli (1877-1887), every Barnabite is to have a copy of the painting of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence, in his room. She is the Madonna of the Barnabites. She is depicted with purple robe and a blue mantle, a fine veil on her head, flowing on her shoulders. In her arms she holds her Divine Child. The fingers of the Baby confidently clasp those of Mary. The Barnabites interpret this pose to be a symbol of the sacred source of the power of the Mother of God. The Child seems to be saying: "Mother, I place in your hands the authority to act in my name. From my infinite treasure, you are to provide good things to those who implore your aid." This is the source of the title of Our Lady, Mother of Divine Providence.

The Marian devotion of the Barnabites has found expression through the centuries in great apostolic endeavors. Here we shall select two: the Basilica of Our Lady of Nazaré in Belem, Pará, Brazil, and Our Lady of Fatima Shrine, Youngstown, New York.

HYMN

Mother of Jesus, God's eternal Son,
Pray for us dear Mother of Divine Providence,
Mighty protection, we humbly implore you
Let your maternal care direct us.

Ref: O Mother of Divine Providence
turn your eyes on us your children
that the light of your Divine grace
may shine eternally with our needy hearts.

O chosen daughter, Mother of the Lord
yours is the hope of sinners, mother of salvation
Turn your maternal gaze on us
Shine brightly along our way
Listen to those who invoke you.
Holy Virgin, good and blessed one,
Mother of humanity, of gentleness and strength
Open to us your heart, teach us wisdom and love
Grant peace and hope to all nations.

BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF NAZARÉ - BRAZIL

A visitor arriving at Belém (Pará) through the mouth of the Amazon river is completely amazed to discover, in the middle of the tropical forest, the splendid Basilica of Our Lady of Nazaré, all in marble, a perfect copy in miniature of St. Paul outside the wall in Rome. In the piazza there is a monument to the man, Fr. Alfonso Di Giorgio, who envisioned, worked tirelessly, and brought to completion the dream. The materials: marble, stained glasses, and mosaics, all came from Italy to create what is called "The wonder of Brazil." The Basilica is nothing less than a splendid frame for a tiny miraculous statue of the Blessed Mother (the ***Aparicida***) found along the shore of the river by an Indios in the 1700's. The Indios brought it home, but the little statue kept returning to the river; so he decided to build a chapel on the spot. It did not take long for the little chapel to become the goal of pilgrims.

The little statue (only 60 cm.) received the title "Nossa Senhora de Nazaré." In 1903 a group of Barnabites, expelled from France, arrived in Brazil. The bishop of Belem entrusted to their care a parish on the periphery of the city, which happened to include the little chapel along the river. It did not take long to decide that the statue deserved a better temple. The Basilica with five naves, sixty stained-glass windows, thirty-two pink granite columns, and fifty mosaics, started in 1909, was completed in 1918; the three bronze doors were added in 1961.

The annual celebration of Nossa Senhora de Nazaré goes on for fifteen days, with its central event a solemn procession from the local Cathedral to the Basilica, called the "**Cirio**," that is, the candle, because the participants fulfill their vows to the Blessed Mother by offering a candle of the same height as its bearer. Usually more than a million people participate in the procession. The chariot which carries the little statue is pulled with extra long ropes by bare-footed "penitents," while others follow, carrying the greatest variety of objects which testify to a particular grace received.

Paul VI, in 1971, said: "the joy and sadness of a people floods through the streets of Belem like a stream, looking for God and his love; they pray, sing, and share brotherhood under the maternal gaze of **Nossa Senhora de Nazaré**."

Basilica of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima

LEWISTON, NEW YORK

Since 1954, Our Lady of Fatima Shrine has become a place of natural beauty, art, communal prayer, and renewal to thousands who visit the unique buildings and grounds each year. The magnificence and natural beauty of the Shrine is highlighted by an awe-inspiring Dome Basilica covered with two layers of glass and Plexiglas, with a contour of the Northern Hemisphere of the globe. The impressive approach to the Basilica is down the Avenue of the Saints (over one hundred life-size marble statues represent Saints from every race and walk of life) and around the serenity of the Rosary Pool. Two flights of stairs, with 63 steps, lead to the top of the Dome, where, in graceful majesty, stands a huge statue of Our Lady of Fatima. The statue, carved from Vermont granite, is 13 feet high and weighs ten tons. From the top of the Dome, visitors can view the entire Shrine grounds and surrounding countryside.

"Sometime ago I had a serious stroke; my wife, too, got sick. We turned to Blessed Mother Mary for help, promising Her that we would donate a portion of our farm to a religious institution that would use it in Her honor. Both of us recovered and were waiting for the right opportunity to fulfill our promise. The Blessed Mother sends you, Barnabites. You asked for 10 acres, but we want to give you fifteen for one dollar."

Fulfilling the promise to Our Lady, the remarkable faith and generosity of Walter and Helen Ciurczak and family of Niagara Falls, N.Y. marked the origin of our Shrine in 1954-1955.

In the summer of 1956, the original shanty, used by the first director of the Shrine, was replaced by a modest but larger building which housed the original chapel, a room for the Shrine director and a small hall where friends and visitors gathered to dream, plan and work for a beautiful future. On the grounds the first simple shrine of Our Lady of Fatima and Children (known today as Fatima Hill) began to attract pilgrims and benefactors.

In 1957 a 13-foot granite statue of Mary became the focus of the developing Shrine. Soon, starting in 1958, life-size Carrara marble statues of Jesus, Mary and Saints, all donated by devotees, began to outline a cross-shaped outdoor cathedral, complete with Stations of the Cross etched in glass. Today the statues number over 100.

A heart-shaped Rosary Pond, excavated in 1957, was soon to reflect the Dome church, a giant unique pedestal for the large statue of Mary.

Begun in 1963, the Dome Church was completed and dedicated in 1965, consecrated in 1974, and given the title of Basilica by Pope Paul VI during the Holy Year 1975. The same year saw the addition of an impressive Peace Mural as a backdrop to the main altar. It is the work of the late Polish artist, Joseph Slawinski, done in an ancient art form called SGRAFFITO, in which pictures are "scratched out" from layers of wet colored cement.

To mark the Marian Year, 1987-1988, a replica of the original Chapel of the Apparitions in Fatima, Portugal, was erected on newly acquired grounds.

Throughout the years our Shrine, “one of the most awesome spectacle in Niagara County,” (Niagara Gazette, March 28, 1989, A-3), has served thousands and thousands of people as an ideal place for spiritual renewal.

Every year, on the second Sunday of August, Coronation Sunday, a crown is placed on the large statue of Mary on top of the Basilica. A typical year sees the observance of many special events, like Polish Day. Korean Day, Spanish Day, Ukrainian Catholic Day, with a special Byzantine liturgy, Senior Citizens Day, Vietnamese Day, Filipino Day, the feast of St. Ann, the feast of St. Angelo with the Blessing of oranges, the feast of the Holy Family for newlyweds, etc. And the year ends with the spectacular festival of lights, which has become a tradition of Niagara Falls. Thousands of lights depict the Christmas scenes on the grounds of the Shrine, blanketed by the white snow, while other thousands of glittering lights outline the frame of the dome basilica, creating a most enchanting atmosphere to celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus.

To Prepare the Basilica for the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima May 13 – October 13, 2017, Our Lady of Fatima Shrine is undergoing its most significant renovation and addition in over fifty years. Both the Barnabite Fathers and the Fatima Shrine Advisory Board have collaborated with architects and engineers for the restoration and design of 7,400 sq.ft. of space.